Unit .32

Session .03

The Church Is United in the Gospel

Scripture

1 Corinthians 1:10-13, 17-21; John 17:20 -23

10 Now I urge you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree in what you say, that there be no divisions among you, and that you be united with the same understanding and the same conviction. **11** For it has been reported to me about you, my brothers and sisters, by members of Chloe's people, that there is rivalry among you. **12** What I am saying is this: One of you says, "I belong to Paul," or "I belong to Apollos," or "I belong to Cephas," or "I belong to Christ." **13** Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in Paul's name? ... **17** For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel—not with eloquent wisdom, so that the cross of Christ will not be emptied of its effect. **18** For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but it is the power of God to us who are being saved. **19** For it is written, **I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and I will set aside the intelligence of the intelligent. 20** Where is the one who is wise? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the debater of this age? Hasn't God made the world's wisdom foolish? **21** For since, in God's wisdom, the world did not know God through wisdom, God was pleased to save those who believe through the foolishness of what is preached. ... **20** "I pray not only for these, but also for those who believe in me through their word. **21** May they all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us, so that the world may believe you sent me. **22** I have given them the glory you have given me, so that they may be one as we are one. **23** I am in them and you are in me, so that they may be made completely one, that the world may know you have sent me and have loved them as you have loved me.

Intro Options

Main Point:
God unites the church through the gospel.

Option 1

Have your students get into groups of two or three. Have them give a response to one of the following scenarios.

Scenario 1: Jill is a Christian who hasn't belonged to a church lately. She knows she should be active with a local congregation, but she's nervous about trying to attend a service, much less become active in the youth group. Church can be a place for squabbles, fights, gossip, and worse. She knows she should go anyway, but she's lacking the courage or incentive to do so. What would you say to her?

Scenario 2: Jack is a Christian who's a regular part of his church and youth group. However, he's thinking he'll stop going. He doesn't really fit in, and a lot of the group and their activities are centered around cliques or the more popular kids. He knows he should stay, but he doesn't want to. What counsel would you give Jack about staying or even improving the not-so-good environment of his youth group?

[redacted] middle school youth group. He wants his youth group to be content in [redacted]xes there are some unhealthy relationships and attitudes present. Youth group seems to be more about cliques, video games, sports, and school than about Jesus. He'd like some wisdom from your middle school group on how to bring his kids together in Jesus. What advice would you offer?

Let the students think up and share what advice they would offer. Use the conversation to gauge what they think about the unity of the church. Look for a segue into today's session about the unity of the church. At the close of the session, you could ask them how they would change their advice to the people in the scenarios above.

As a large group, list different ways people are united. Examples include love for a particular video game, being on the same sports team, family, belonging to the same nation. Once you have a good-sized list, ask your students to sort the list from least important to most important.

If it's not already on your list, suggest being part of church or belonging to Jesus as a bond. Ask the students where they would rank it. Today's session will be about how the church needs to be united. If you wish, after the session, ask students if they would change where they originally ranked church on the list and why.

TEACHING PLAN

Read 1 Corinthians 1:10-13.

Paul's plea for unity in the church begins by addressing them as "brothers and sisters" (1 Cor 1:10). He is basically saying, "we're family, so act like it." Sure, siblings fight, but there is a love and loyalty that transcends their differences because they share the same name. The same idea applies to believers, which is why Paul addresses them in the "name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor 1:10). He says this as a way of grounding his command in Christ's authority instead of his own. A common adage says blood is thicker than water, but the blood of Jesus should supersede even biological relationships.

- **How do you think Christians viewing each other as family would improve our unity?**

Paul doesn't just tell the Corinthians to agree to disagree. This is not some superficial unity; it is a true agreement that creates a loyal bond. He says to "agree in what you say," and "be united with the same understanding and same conviction" (1 Cor. 1:10). Understanding of what exactly? Conviction about what? Surely Paul does not mean everything. There is room in the family for diversity of opinions on some issues, so what does Paul have in mind? A unity of identity. For the church at Corinth, that meant refusing to put their identity in a particular apostle or church leader rather than in Christ.

- **What are some things we put our identity in that divide us, and how can we overcome those divisions?**

It seems that the early church in Corinth was plagued with a kind of Christian celebrity culture much like the American church is today. There is a great temptation to have a favorite pastor, teacher, or Christian leader whose "tribe" becomes your Christian identity. But it's not just tribes within the church that divide us: we are divided by politics, schools, sports, stereotypes and cliques. Paul's plea is that the church would see that what unites us is greater than what divides us. We belong to Christ, have been baptized in His name, have been adopted into His family, and have been saved by His cross. That is our identity, so may we all "be united in the same understanding and same conviction."

Read 1 Corinthians 1:17-21.

Crucifixion had an enormous cultural stigma that is almost imperceivable to us today. Romans used crucifixion as a cruel form of public execution to display their authority and bring rebels into submission. For Jews, being crucified was associated with being cursed (Gal. 3:13). And yet, Paul was going around the Roman world and to Jewish synagogues in every city to proclaim salvation through the cross. In order to bring rebellious sinners under the authority of God, Paul was preaching that Jesus displayed on the cross that He is the true King. Paul was preaching that Jesus took our curse in order to redeem us from the curse. A symbol of shame has become the Christian's boast (Gal. 6:14).

- **In what ways might we be tempted to add to the message of the cross to make it more appealing?**

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
God unites the church through the gospel.

1 Corinthians 1

1:10-13. "If a football team is unified, it does not mean that everyone's playing the same position. It does mean everybody's going to the same goal line. If an orchestra is harmonious, it's not because they're all playing the same instrument; it's because they're all playing the same song. If a chorus is singing in great harmony, it's not because they are singing the same parts; it's because they're adding their part to the same song. It is the goal that produces unity. Unity is not sameness. Unity has to do with the same purpose."[1]

"Paul is by no means discrediting baptism. He is following the example Jesus set during his earthly ministry: Christ proclaimed the gospel and the disciples baptized the believers (John 4:1-2). Jesus designated the Apostles fishers of men (Matt. 4:19) and commissioned them to catch men through preaching. Paul had to use all his time and talent to preach the Word and hence left the matter of baptism primarily to others."[2]

"The church is called to put down their preferences and pick up their crosses."[3]

Activity

Once you've finished going through the session, break your students into small groups. Give each group an index card. On that card, they should write something that breaks the unity of the church. It could be something broad (favoritism, different financial status, different musical tastes) or specific (bitterness because some people didn't get invited to a birthday party, etc). Collect the cards and then pass them back out again at random to the groups. It's okay if a group gets their own card back again.

The group now has two assignments: first, they should figure out how the unity of the gospel overcomes whatever cause for division they got on their card. Second, they should explain how the resolution of this division can witness the world about the gospel of Jesus. They can either explain it verbally or, if time and creativity allow, they can show the resolution and witness in a comic or skit. Debrief by discussing ideas about how your youth group can foster the unity of the church in the gospel of Jesus as a witness to your community.

1. *Tony Evans, Tony Evans' Book of Illustrations: Stories, Quotes, and Anecdotes From More Than 30 Years of Preaching and Public Speaking (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2009).*
2. *Simon J. Kistemaker, New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1993).*
3. *Derwin Grey, "TOGETHER WITH ONE VOICE: WE BELONG TO JESUS," Transformation Church, January 11, 2015, https://www.transformationchurch.tc/sermonfiles/studyguide/2015/TWOV/StudyGuide-150111-One_Voice-BelongToJesus.pdf.*

99 Essential Doctrines (p. 64, DDG)

Unity of the Church

Christ's desire for the church is that we be united as one in Him by the gospel (Phil. 2:1-2), reflecting the oneness of our trinitarian God (John 17:20-23). As such, we are to allow for no divisions to separate us (1 Cor. 1:10), such as ethnicity, socio-economics, nationality, language, politics, or secondary doctrinal beliefs. Our objective is not simply to work around or look past these differences within the body of Christ but to celebrate the diversity of God's people made one in Christ (1 Cor. 12:12-13; Eph. 4:4-6,11-13), demonstrating humility (Rom. 12:3,16; Phil. 2:5-11) and freely loving and forgiving one another (Col. 3:13-14) to reflect the power of Christ who reconciles all things to Himself (Ps. 133:1; Eph. 1:10; 2:14).

TEACHING PLAN

There is a great temptation to take more culturally acceptable messages and sprinkle some Jesus on them in an effort to win the world. This takes on many forms. In some contexts, the message may be self-help + Jesus, or be the best version of you + Jesus. In other contexts, the message may be the American dream + Jesus, prosperity + Jesus, or a political cause + Jesus. But Jesus didn't die just for us to improve ourselves, believe in ourselves, live our best lives now, or give our ultimate allegiance to our political convictions. The church should be united in the message of the cross.

▪ What about the "foolish" message of the cross is so powerful?

Oh, the foolishness of the cross (1 Cor. 1:18)– God brings justice through an injustice, love through an act of hate, and life through a horrific death. But what power the cross possesses "to save completely those who come to God" (Heb. 7:25). The message of the cross brings together so many longings of the human heart. It satisfies our desire for unconditional love, washes the conscience of the worst of sinners, breaks the power of brokenness, and demonstrates that the kingdoms of this world and the powers of darkness cannot overcome the light. Justice and righteousness are upheld, and yet mercy and forgiveness are extended. God, unable to compromise His goodness and unwilling to condemn His people, comes down to us in order to bring us to Himself. Is there any better news in all of creation?

Read John 17:20-23.

Jesus' prayer is that we would be one. As such, we should be anchored in unity—not some superficial unity that is artificially preserved by avoiding things that are difficult, but a unity that is rooted in our mutual belonging to God and our shared commitment to Jesus and His mission. The world is divided over so many things, but when the church exemplifies unity in diversity, we are a light in a dark world.

▪ How does our unity or disunity affect the world's view of Jesus?

There's more at stake in our unity than merely our testimony, our name, or our reputation. The name of Jesus, the reputation of Jesus, and the world seeing the true identity and glory of Jesus is at stake. Jesus prayed for our unity, "so that the world may believe you sent me" (John 17:21). When we claim the name of Christ, our reputation, to some degree, becomes the reputation Jesus gets in our community. What would the world believe about Jesus based on what they see in our churches?

My dad would always tell us, "Remember what your name is." It was a way of reminding us that the testimony of our family was linked to our behavior. It takes time to build a good name, but only a moment to ruin it. We should cherish the name of Jesus and be careful not to dishonor His name with disunity in the church.

▪ How is unity countercultural, and why would that make the gospel attractive?

When we invite others to know Christ, we are inviting them to be members of His church. We are welcoming them into a family—but who wants to join a family that is always fighting? Who wants to be a part of a team that is divided? The world will not see the love of Jesus in the church if we cannot even love one another. Our church culture should be attractive to those on the outside. They should see our love and care for one another and say, "they're different, and I want what they have."

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
God unites the church through the gospel.

1 Corinthians 1

1:17-18. "The [New Testament] gives us a conversionist mission that will have cultural effects, not a cultural mission with conversion effects."[4]

From beginning to end, the Scriptures are supremely about the gospel. It is the *main* thing throughout all of Scripture, and yet, it is not the *only* thing throughout. We should preach the gospel first and foremost, but that does not mean we should be silent on other issues. The Scriptures speak to all areas of life (justice, abortion, race, marriage, sexuality, etc.), and we should be willing to speak God's truth on any subject.

But there is a temptation to speak out on certain issues in order to create a certain image with people, either in the church or the culture, rather than to please God. Two questions can act as a check on this tendency: 1. Am I willing to stand up for things that aren't popular within my own tribe? 2. Is my lifestyle magnifying the message of the cross?

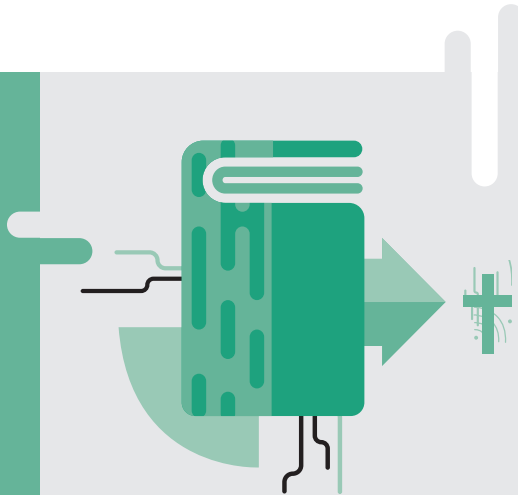
When we live in a way that is consistent with our message and speak the truth boldly, regardless of who is for our against it, then we demonstrate that our motives and our message are true.

1:19. In verse 19, Paul quoted Isaiah 29:14. There, Isaiah warned Judah that God would judge them for relying on the intelligence of the world rather than Him. He foresees the day where "God would destroy human wisdom. He would do things to frustrate the intelligent, philosophical, and religious outlook that humans raised against his revelation. Paul used this Old Testament quotation to show the Corinthians that a fundamental antithesis exists between the true wisdom of God and the wisdom of the world."[5]

4. Albert Mohler quoted in 9Marks Twitter post, June 10, 2017, 1:08 p.m., https://twitter.com/9Marks/status/873602908830355456
5. Richard L Jr. Pratt, Holman New Testament Commentary - 1 & 2 Corinthians (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2000).

(p. 66, DDG) Christ Connection

Paul wrote to the church at Corinth to address several problems they were facing, including division, because the church lost sight of their unity in the gospel. Through Jesus' death and resurrection, believers are brought into one body to live in unity and harmony as an expression of the great power of the gospel.



LESSON 94: ACCEPTANCE
SENT TO UNITE IN THE GOSPEL

1 Corinthians 10:1-13, 17-21; John 17:20-23

SENT TO UNITE IN THE GOSPEL

God unites the church through the gospel.

JESUS CONNECTION

While addressing the many problems they were facing, Paul reminded the church at Corinth to focus on the gospel instead of arguing about foolish things. Through Jesus' death and resurrection, believers are brought into one body to live in unity and harmony as an expression of the great power of the gospel.

LIFEWISE QUALITY

ACCEPTANCE – Choosing to treat everyone equally.

HEAD

What was the church at Corinth arguing about?

What does Jesus pray for in John 17:20-23? Why is this so essential?

HEART

What are some ways we think of ourselves or others that divide us? How can knowing that Jesus prayed for the unity of His followers motivate us to work through these divisions?

Jesus said that the Holy Spirit would connect His followers to Christ and to one another. How might knowing that you are connected spiritually to other disciples change the way you think of and interact with them?

HANDS

It isn't always easy to accept other people, especially when someone speaks and acts differently than we do. However, God calls us to treat every person with equal respect and consideration. This doesn't mean we have to agree with everything someone thinks, says or does. It does mean that we choose to acknowledge the worth of each person regardless of what they do. Think of someone you have trouble accepting or getting along with. Ask God to help you treat that person respectfully this week. Use the list below or come up with your own ideas on how to treat this person respectfully.

1. Acknowledge them (look them in the eye, smile or say hello)

2. Involve them (speak to them, include them and listen to their viewpoint and opinions considerately)

3. Treat them with the same respect and kindness that you would a friend